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United States Department of State

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INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

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TO: The Secretary
THROUGH: G - Mr. Wirth
FROM: AF - George E. Moose
SUBJECT: New Outflow of Refugees from Rwanda

SUMMARY

Intelligence reports indicate displaced persons are now on the move in the French safe zone in southwest Rwanda and are starting to cross over into Bukavu in Zaire. While we do not yet know the dimensions of the move, it has the potential to be as large or larger than the outflow to Goma. We are alerting the major players and gearing up to respond.

DISCUSSION

Preliminary intelligence reports indicate that thousands of Rwandans have begun moving from the eastern portion of the French safe zone in southwest Rwanda headed for Bukavu across the border in Zaire. The movement started last night. At mid-day, UNHCR reported that 5000 persons had already entered Bukavu, and 600 people per hour were crossing the border. The displaced persons began moving from the Gikongoro area, a portion of the safe zone which the Ghanaian UNAMIR troops have begun taking over from the French.

There are an estimated one million displaced persons in the safe zone and another one to one and one-half million residents. Nearly all are Hutu and many, possibly the great majority, fear the RPF. Many lack confidence that UNAMIR troops will effectively protect them from the RPF, as they perceive the French to be doing. Moreover, extremist Hutu leaders in the zone are actively pushing the population to flee.

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There is a serious possibility that the magnitude and speed of the outflow into Bukavu could well match or exceed the outflow of refugees into Goma in July. UNHCR officials fear that the outflow will be more difficult to handle than Goma because there are few suitable areas for settlement sites and an inadequate amount of pre-positioned relief supplies.

When the movement became apparent, we alerted UNHCR, ICRC, and the NGO community to prepare for the influx. We discussed the problem with Ambassador Rawson in Kigali, and he noted that the French are the only voices that the Hutus in the zone might listen to, other than their own leaders who are pushing them to flee. We have contacted the French to urge them to try to calm the population and offer reassurances that they will be protected, both by the French and, ultimately, by UNAMIR. We have also alerted the French to our concern that over ten thousand displaced Tutsis near Cyangugu, in the southwest corner of the zone, are in the path of the fleeing Hutus and may be at risk. We have asked the French to make sure this group is protected, consistent with the mandate of Operation Turquoise. We have also discussed this issue with ICRC, which is equally concerned and has raised the problem with UNAMIR and others in Kigali.

UNHCR and relief organizations have already done contingency planning for a possible large influx of refugees into Bukavu. Ambassador Rawson reports that the UN SYG's Special Representative for Rwanda Shaharyar Khan held a major coordination meeting today to discuss contingencies for addressing the problem. Embassy Kinshasa Charge will brief the Foreign Minister early Saturday on the new refugee influx, and will ask for cooperation from the Zairian government should the U.S. military need to deploy quickly to Bukavu to cope with this phase of the crisis. We expect the Zairians to be responsive. An Embassy officer is on site now in Bukavu.

The Department is in contact with DoD on an emergency basis to increase the capacity of Bukavu airport, although this may only go a small way toward addressing the increased needs. We hope to get DoD assistance to bring in additional equipment for offloading cargo and for technical assistance to upgrade airport capabilities quickly. If the refugee outflow is sizable, we will need to consider diverting relief supplies and equipment into Bukavu. A large cargo of U.S. relief equipment, including water purification equipment, is waiting at the port in Mombasa, Kenya, and might be directed to Bukavu if the need is there.

We will continue to monitor the situation very closely over the next few days and respond as necessary.

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